

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05
PC-01 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /076 W
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R 231315Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1465
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBZSSY KATHMANDU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 2679

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: INDIAN ELECTIONS: CAMPAIGN RHETORIC

REF: NEW DELHI 2521

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: THE CONGRESS AND OPPOSITION
LISTS HAVE NOW BEEN MORE OR LESS FINALIZED WITH THE
PASSING OF THE LAST DAY FOR WITHDRAWING NOMINATIONS, AND
THE CANDIDATES HAVE HIT THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL IN EARNEST.
IN CONTRAST TO 1971, PERSONALITIES (I.E., MRS GANDHI)
HAVE NOT PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE ELECTORAL RHETORIC
SO FAR; RATHER, THE SLOGANS OF THE TWO FRONTS HAVE FOCUSED
ON THE BROADER ISSUES OF "DEMOCRACY VS. DICTATORSHIP"
(FOR THE OPPOSITION) AND "DEMOCRACY VS. DISRUPTION"
(FOR THE CONGRESS). THE EMERGENCY
FIGURES AS THE PRIME ISSUE FOR BOTH SIDES, WITH THE
CONGRESS EXTOLLING ITS GAINS AND ACHIEVEMENTS, WHILE THE
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OPPOSITION ATTACKS THE "MISDEEDS" INFLICTED UPON THE
PEOPLE DURING THE PAST 19 MONTHS. A COROLLARY ISSUE
IS THE ABILITY OF THE OPPOSITION TO FORM A STABLE, WORKING
GOVERNMENT SHOULD IT GAIN A MAJORITY. WE CANNOT RULE
OUT, HOWEVER, THE POSSIBILITY THAT BOTH CONGRESS AND THE
OPPOSITION MAY RESORT TO INCREASINGLY PERSONAL AND VIT-
UPERATIVE ATTACKS UPON EACH OTHER AS THE CAMPAIGN PRO-

GRESSES. FOREIGN ISSUES, THUS FAR, HAVE NOT BEEN NOTICEABLE IN CAMPAIGN RHETORIC BY EITHER SIDE. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

1. MRS GANDHI KICKED OFF HER BARNSTORMING MONTH-LONG NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TOUR ON FEBRUARY 17 WITH A QUICK SWING THROUGH HER HOME CONSTITUENCY OF RAE BARELLI (UP). SHE HAS SINCE TRAVELED AROUND WEST BENGAL AND THE NORTHEAST. HER SPEECHES HAVE COVERED THE FAMILIAR THEMES: JUSTIFICATION OF IMPOSING THE EMERGENCY AND CITATION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL GAINS ACHIEVED IN THE PAST 19 MONTHS. CLAIMING THAT THE OPPOSITION HAS NO ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS OR POLICIES TO ENSURE THE COUNTRY'S CONTINUED UNITY AND PROGRESS, THE PM HAS FREQUENTLY DECLARED THAT THE CONGRESS IS THE SOLE PARTY WHICH STANDS FOR DEMOCRACY, SOCIALISM AND SECULARISM. SHE ALSO HAS OBSERVED THAT SOME WESTERN COUNTRIES WHICH HAD BEEN SHARPLY CRITICAL OF THE EMERGENCY HAD NOW COME TO APPRECIATE THE GAINS OF THE PAST 19 MONTHS. MRS GANDHI HAS DWELT AT LENGTH UPON WHAT SHE DESCRIBES AS THE "HOTCH-POTCH" NATURE OF THE OPPOSITION, DECLARING THAT IT WOULD BE UNABLE TO FORM A STABLE GOVERNMENT. ONE OF HER FAVORITE SLOGANS IS TO POSE THE CHOICE BEFORE VOTERS AS ONE OF "DEMOCRACY VS. DISRUPTION". CLAIMING THAT THE CONGRESS HAS ALWAYS STOOD FOR STABILITY AND NATIONAL UNITY, THE PM SAID IN A FEBRUARY 17 INTERVIEW TO THE PRO-CONGRESS "NATIONAL HERALD" THAT TO HAND OVER THE GOVERNMENT TO COALITIONS "WHICH CONTAIN CONTRADICTORY PULLS" IS TO FORFEIT THE STRENGTH GAINED OVER THE

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PAST 30 YEARS AND THUS "THROW THE NATION INTO CONFUSION". SHE ALSO HAS ASSERTED THAT THE JANATA PARTY IS NOTHING MORE THAN A REVIVAL OF THE OLD "GRAND ALLIANCE" OF 1971 AND THAT IT IS DOMINATED BY THE JAN SANGH AND OTHER COMMUNAL ELEMENTS.

2. AS FOR THE OPPOSITION, LEADERS OF THE JANATA PARTY AND THE CONGRESS FOR DEMOCRACY (CFD) HAVE DEVELOPED AS THEIR FAVORITE SLOGAN THE THEME OF THE ELECTIONS BEING A "LAST CHANCE" TO CHOOSE BETWEEN "DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP". IN BITTER ATTACKS ON GOVERNMENT POLICIES, THEY HAVE SOUGHT TO REFUTE CONGRESS' CLAIMS ABOUT THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EMERGENCY AND HAVE HIGHLIGHTED THE "REPRESSION" THAT HAD BEEN UNLEASHED UPON "INNOCENT PEOPLE" DURING EMERGENCY RULE, REFERRING SPECIFICALLY TO FORCED STERILIZATION IN FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM, ARBITRARY ARRESTS, AND OTHER EXCESSES COMMITTED BY THE BUREAUCRACY. OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE ANSWERED CONGRESS CHARGES ABOUT THEIR INABILITY TO FORM A STABLE

GOVERNMENT BY SAYING THAT THE JANATA AND CFD CONTAIN
NUMEROUS LEADERS WHO COULD ASSUME THE REINS OF POWER
AND THAT COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP OUGHT TO REPLACE ONE-
PERSON RULE. THE REAL DANGER TO DEMOCRACY, THEY CON-

TINUE, IS THAT IN THE CONGRESS THERE IS ONLY ONE
PERSON WHO CAN BE THE LEADER. JAGJIVAN RAM HAS
REPORTEDLY CHARGED THAT THE PM ACTS AS IF INDIA'S
LEADERSHIP WAS THE MONOPOLY OF ONE FAMILY OR PARTY.

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3. SO FAR, THE OPPOSITION HAS REFRAINED FROM PERSONAL
ATTACKS ON MRS GANDHI, IN CONTRAST TO ITS "INDIRA
HATAO" (REMOVE INDIRA) SLOGAN IN THE 1971 ELECTIONS.
NOR HAS SANJAY FIGURED PUBLICLY IN OPPOSITION ATTACKS,
ALTHOUGH WE UNDERSTAND MUCH IS SAID OF HIM IN PRIVATE.
SPEECHES BY JANATA AND CFD LEADERS CONCENTRATE ON
POLICIES RATHER THAN PERSONALITIES. RAM HAS SAID, FOR
EXAMPLE, THAT THE ELECTIONS WERE NOT A "FIGHT AGAINST
ANY INDIVIDUAL, BUT A FIGHT FOR PRINCIPLES. I HAVE
NOTHING PERSONAL AGAINST PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI.
I HAVE PARTED COMPANY WITH HER BECAUSE OF THE ABRIDGE-
MENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC FUNCTIONING OF BOTH THE GOVERN-
MENT AND THE CONGRESS PARTY." NONETHELESS, AS THE
RHETORIC OF THE CAMPAIGN GATHERS HEAT, PERSONALITIES

(PARTICULARLY THAT OF MRS GANDHI) ARE LIKELY TO INEVITABLY
FIGURE PROMINENTLY. DESPITE HER REPEATED CLAIMS TO BE
A SELFLESS SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE, WHO HAS NOTHING
AGAINST ANY INDIVIDUAL, THE PM SEEMS UNABLE TO RESIST
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GOADING HER OPPONENTS INTO A PERSONAL CLASH AND HAS
ALREADY BEGUN HURLING CHARGES THAT THE OPPOSITION
HAD UNIFIED "ONLY TO ENCIRCLE AND STAB ME". SPEAKING
AT A RALLY IN WEST BENGAL OVER THE WEEKEND, SHE
REPORTEDLY SAID: "THE PRIME MINISTER REPRESENTS THE
WHOLE OF THE COUNTRY AND ANY ATTACK ON HIM OR HER IS
AN ATTACK ON THE ENTIRE POPULATION.... THE ABUSES BEING
HURLED AT ME BY THE OPPOSITION ARE TARNISHING THE IMAGE
OF INDIA". THE JANATA AND CFD QUICKLY RESPONDED WITH
THE CHARGE THAT THE INDIVIDUAL CANNOT BE EQUATED WITH
THE OFFICE: TO CLAIM THAT THE PERSON OF THE PRIME
MINISTER IS SACROSANCT IS TANTAMOUNT TO GIVING HER
"DICTATORIAL POWERS", ACCORDING TO CFD LEADER BAHUGUNA.

4. COMMENT: PERSONAL ACRIMONY BETWEEN CONGRESS AND
OPPOSITION LEADERS IS LIKELY TO INCREASE IN THE COMING
WEEKS, PARTICULARLY IF MRS GANDHI FEELS THAT SUCH A
CONFRONTATION WOULD BOOST HER PARTY'S ELECTORAL
PROSPECTS IF THE GOING GETS ROUGH. IN 1971, SHE HAD
USED THIS TACTIC EFFECTIVELY TO PROJECT HERSELF AS A
BELEAGUED OPPONENT OF THE OLD, CONSERVATIVE BOSSES.
ALTHOUGH THE SITUATION HAS CHANGED CONSIDERABLY, SHE
MIGHT FIND THIS STRATEGY USEFUL ONCE AGAIN, PARTICULARLY
IN VIEW OF HER JANUARY 18 WARNING TO THE OPPOSITION
TO ABJURE CALUMNY AND PERSONAL VILIFICATION.
THE OPPOSITION, FOR ITS PART, PROBABLY REMEMBERS
THIS WARNING TO ABIDE BY THE RULES OF THE GAME OR
ELSE SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES, BUT MAY FIND ITSELF PROVOKED
INTO SUCH A CONFRONTATION BY FURTHER ACCUSATIONS
FROM THE PM.

5. THE EMERGENCY AND ITS ALLEGED ACHIEVEMENTS OR
MISDEEDS REMAIN THE CENTRAL ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN AT
PRESENT. THE OPPOSITION HAS SOUGHT TO TRANSLATE ITS
ABSTRACT "DEMOCRACY VS. DICTATORSHIP" SLOGAN INTO A
MORE CONCRETE ELECTORAL APPEAL BY CITING THE AUTORI-
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TARIAN ASPECTS OF EMERGENCY RULE WHICH HAVE BEEN
EXPERIENCED BY ORDINARY PEOPLE: FORCIBLE STERILIZA-

TION, ARBITRARY ARRESTS, HIGHHANDEDNESS BY BUREAUCRATIC OFFICIALS, AND SO ON. ON THE OTHER HAND, MRS GANDHI AND OTHER CONGRESS LEADERS TRY TO OFFSET THIS APPEAL BY EMPHASIZING THE DISJOINTED NATURE OF THE OPPOSITION AND ITS ALLEGED INABILITY TO FORM A STABLE GOVERNMENT. ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, SHE HAS REMINDED HER LISTENERS OF THE CHAOTIC SITUATIONS WHICH PREVAILED IN SEVERAL STATES AFTER 1967 UNDER THE SO-CALLED UNITED OPPOSITION GOVERNMENTS. HER CHARACTERIZATION OF THE CONGRESS AS THE GUARANTOR OF CONTINUED STABILITY MAY STRIKE A RESPONSIVE CHORD AMONG SOME VOTERS.

6. THUS FAR IN THE CAMPAIGN, NEITHER SIDE HAS MADE FOREIGN POLICY A ISSUE. ON A FEW OCCASIONS, MRS. GANDHI HAS MADE BRIEF, VAGUE REFERENCES TO "CERTAIN PEOPLE" GETTING HELP FROM "FOREIGN POWERS", CHARGES THAT WERE QUICKLY AND HOTLY DENIED BY THE OPPOSITION. SCHNEIDER

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